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ABSTRACT

Successful bilingual programs depend on some understanding of the language situation involved, the possible strategies of bilingual education, the effects of these strategies, the assessment of community desires, the best ways to find and train teachers, the method of evaluating curriculum, the effect of learning styles, and the possibilities of bilingual curriculum development. The evidence on each of these issues is limited for bilingual education in general but is even more limited in the case of American Indian education. The development of viable bilingual education programs for Indians requires a number of studies: (1) a language census; (2) a major study or series of studies of the effect of various patterns of bilingual education; (3) a study of the effect of community involvement in bilingual education programs; (4) a study of the effectiveness of various patterns of teacher and assistant preparation and cooperation; (5) research projects concerned with belief systems, language use and function, and language acquisition and direct studies of learning styles; and (6) studies of the problems of developing curriculum in Indian languages. (JH)

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EVALUATION OF RESEARCH ON

BILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR AMERICAN INDIANS

A Position Paper
Submitted to
Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory

By
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Research and Development Needs and Priorities for the Education of American Indians: Evaluation of Research on Bilingual Education

Bernard Spolsky

A satisfactory base for bilingual education programs depends on some reasonable understanding of each of the following issues: the language situation involved, the possible strategies of bilingual education, the effects of these strategies, the assessment of community desires, the best ways to find and train teachers, the method of evaluating curriculum, the effect of learning styles, and the possibilities of bilingual curriculum development. Sparse as is the evidence on each of these issues for those of us concerned with bilingual education in general, it is even more scant in the case of Indian education.

1. Research on the language situation is needed to answer two questions: how many speakers of the language are there, and what is the sociolinguistic role of the language? In his pioneering study of non-English speakers in the U. S. educational system, Allen (1966) pointed out the impossibility of making even a reasonable guess at the number of children involved. Saville and Troike (1970) guess that 10% of the U. S. population speak a language other than English

natively, but do not claim to know how many of these speakers are children. What is the situation with American Indians? The 1960 Census counted 523,591 Indians in the United States (including Alaska); in 1962 it was estimated that 300,000 lived on and another 66,000 lived adjacent to reservations. How many of these still speak their own language? Basing an estimate on Chafe (1962), we find his figures for the individual languages to total up to over 350,000. The number of languages listed with living speakers are as follows:

1 - 10	:	51 languages
10 - 100	:	38 languages
100 - 1000	:	74 languages
1000 - 10,000	:	48 languages
over 10,000	:	6 languages
Total	:	217 languages

Of the 217, Chafe considered that only 71 had speakers of all ages. The need for an accurate language census as a first step in planning Indian bilingual education cannot be overstressed.

The next question to be asked is the nature of language use by the group concerned, the strength of language loyalty, and the likelihood of language maintenance. Fishman (1966) does not deal with American Indian languages, except to remark

> "Almost all American Indians now speak English; a substantial number are still bilingual; only a minor fraction (primarily individuals of advanced age) are monolingual in one or another Indian language." (p. 22)

Bilingual education is not for "individuals of advanced age", and viable programs will probably be possible only where a reasonable number of children come to school speaking the native language. One survey in this area has recently been done: Spolsky (1970) reports that overall, between 70% and 90% of Navajo six-year-olds in schools surveyed did not speak enough English to do first grade work; for Zuni, the figure was over 90%.

2. The multiplicity of possible strategies for bilingual education remained confused until Mackey (1969) developed his typology and Andersson and Boyer (1970) used it as the basis for describing curriculum designs. Assuming a situation where the child's language is different from that of the society for which the school prepares him, a school may use a single language as the medium of instruction, or it may use two languages; it may aim to maintain the child's language, or to transfer him to a second language; it may be directed towards assimilation into a dominant culture, or to maintenance of the two languages as equal but different, or equal but equivalent; the change from one medium may be complete or gradual.

The alternatives may be illustrated by considering some possible approaches to a curriculum for Navajo schools. It

might be decided to teach only in English: in this case, the model will call for first teaching English effectively. Or it might be decided to teach in Navajo only. In this case, the sociolinguistic situation will call for teaching English as a subject to all students who might wish to leave the Reservation, or work with tourists visiting it. These would be single medium patterns. The dual medium patterns are more complex. One strategy would be to teach in Navajo all the time that the children are learning enough English for English to become the medium. How many years this would take is an empirical question. Other patterns would involve maintenance of Navajo as a medium of instruction beyond this time, either for the same subjects as English or for special subjects.

The existence of Mackey's typology now makes possible the more reliable evaluation and comparison of the various programs that can be labeled bilingual.

3. A central cluster of questions for research concerns then the effect of the various strategies. A first question is, which language should be the medium of instruction. This has first a psychological aspect. Does it make any difference to a child's intellectual development whether he

speaks one language or another? Studies of this question, closely related to the linguistic relativity hypothesis, are continuing. An excellent summary by Lenneberg (1967) concludes that "the cognitive processes studied so far are largely independent from peculiarities of any natural languages". Basically, although there are clear surface distinctions between the ways languages map physical reality, and although there are signs these distinctions influence the ease of memory and the ease of description, there is no evidence that these differences are fundamental, or that they prevent the functioning of concept development. Second is a sociolinguistic aspect. What is the role of the languages concerned in the society for which the child is being prepared? In the United States, the answer is clear. Society assumes that its members will be able to function effectively in a variety of Standard English. Speakers of other languages and dialects will be penalized in being denied access to education, employment, and the general culture. At the same time, it is now becoming accepted that ethnic minorities may maintain, for religious, cultural, or ethnic purposes, their various individual traditions, including language.

A second question is, does it make any difference to a child's intellectual development whether he speaks one

language or two? There is still no clear evidence on this question. Studies summarized by Macnamara (1966) generally agree that bilinguals are weaker than monolinguals in the common language. But the complexity of definition of a bilingual and the difficulty of accurate testing make any conclusion difficult. That there are probably psychological benefits from bilingualism (perhaps less ethnocentrism, perhaps even a more sophisticated view of the relation between language and reality) cannot altogether discount the evidence, tentative though it is, that a bilingual's linguistic skill in each of his languages is less than a monolingual's. The effect of this probably shows up in all areas of school learning, but becomes particularly marked when the bilingual is forced to study in his weaker language. While there are a number of descriptions of existing bilingual programs (Andersson and Boyer, 1970; John and Horner, 1970) in print or in preparation, there is as yet no detailed evaluation or research that permits a clear judgment of the effect of the various strategies adopted. It is unlikely that the various evaluation systems built into Title VII programs will do more than indicate the need to continue the program concerned. A major research project concerned with the evaluation of the various strategies must be a high

priority, as was agreed at the National Conference on Bilingual Education: Language Skills, 1969. These recommendations were further refined by a Conference on Language Research and Model Bilingual Schools called by the United States Office of Education in October 1969, at which there was general agreement on a research design. The Conference proposed research in an operational setting, with close cooperation between research groups and the school and community involved. The research groups would function as a resource for the development of innovation programs and, after establishing a baseline, carry out assessment of the effect of innovation.

4. While there is increasing discussion of the importance of <u>community involvement</u> in bilingual as well as other education, there is no evidence of the best method of obtaining such involvement. Witherspoon (1969) analyzes the difficulties of studies of this nature, and reports on the results of three types of evaluation of community involvement. The action of the BIA in encouraging the establishment of boards for its schools permits now a study of the effects of community involvement, and the methods of achieving quality once the community is given such control. In the area of bilingual education, the issue becomes quite complex: it is quite often the case, as evidence from Africa and Oceania shows, that non-English speaking parents assume

that instruction in the vernacular is intended to keep, or results in keeping, their children from access to the general economy. Home is the place for the native language: school is where you learn English. This often leads to opposition by Indian parents to the use of their language in school. Research is needed to establish if such opposition can reasonably be overcome, and how.

5. Studies are needed of the nature of the ideal bilingual education teacher. Which of the many qualifications possible are most important? Should one aim for a trained teacher or one who knows the language of the pupil? How does one find teachers who can work with native-language-speaking assistants in easy cooperation? How should the roles and responsibilities of assistants be defined, their status and qualifications raised? What are the comparative effects of using bilingual and monolingual teachers? What is a good bilingual teacher?

6. Among the many important recommendations of the study of the problem of teaching English to American Indians conducted by the Center of Applied Linguistics (Ohannessian 1967) was one that led to a Conference on Styles of Learning (Center for Applied Linguistics 1968). At this conference Cazden and John discussed results of intelligence

testing of Indian children, evidence suggesting that Indian children tend to learn by looking rather than through language, conflicts in values between Indian cultures and the school, the variation in patterns of socialization, and resultant differences in learning styles. The conference recommended background studies (a language census and reviews of existing literature and current work), the institution of research projects concerned with belief systems, language use and function, and language acquisition, as well as direct studies of learning styles. These recommendations remain to be put into effect.

7. Development of a curriculum for Indian education depends on a clearer understanding of problems of translating a curriculum to another language. There are a number of approaches. Given an area of the curriculum, e. g. science or mathematics, we may choose not to teach it in the vernacular at all. If it is to be taught, a vernacular curriculum may be developed by translation from English, or from scratch. The former is cheaper, but we need to know whether it is possible for given languages. For example, there is no agreement on the Navajo word for "triangle", but one word suggested translates literally "half a square". The implications of this for later work with isosceles

triangles is clear. Or again, Navajo has no simple way of expressing fractions, although it can handle decimals through reference to the money system. Perhaps then a Navajo mathematics curriculum would start with decimals rather than fractions.

To summarize, the development of viable bilingual education programs for American Indians depends on a number of studies:

1. A language census. A refined version of the technique used by Spolsky (1970) should permit rapid and relatively cheap assessment of the present status of a language and the likelihood of its maintenance.

2. A major study, or a series of studies, of the effect of various patterns of bilingual education. The model proposed by the Conference on Language Research and Model Bilingual Schools (1969) offers the technique for this.

3. A study (within [2]) of the effect of community involvement in bilingual education programs.

4. A study (within [2]) of the effectiveness of various patterns of teacher and assistant preparation and cooperation.

5. The carrying out of the principle recommendations of the Styles of Learning Conference.

6. Studies of the problems of developing curriculum in Indian languages.

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